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SERMON CXXI.

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CHRISTIAN OBLIGATIONS.

ROM. xiv. 7, 8.—*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord: and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*

THIS passage contains a comprehensive description of Christian obligation and character. The good man refuses to "live unto himself." In all his designs and movements he feels bound to act "with an eye single" to the glory of the Savior and the extension of his kingdom.

Thus briefly explained, this passage lays the foundation for the following statement, which it is my present purpose to illustrate and apply: *The friends of the Lord Jesus ought to devote themselves without the slightest hesitation or the least reserve to the single object of strengthening the interests and extending the limits of the Christian church.* A construction is often put upon the obligations asserted in this statement, which makes them rest easy upon the conscience of the lax professor. This construction may be thus given: We ought in our hearts to give up ourselves—all we are and all we have—to the Savior, with the resolution, if God requires, ACTUALLY to make the surrender. Thus many a professed Christian is ready to rejoice that he has fallen upon better times, than those in which others have been led to prison and to death. He rejoices, that besides the demands which his religious profession has upon him, he is permitted to have another department of interest and exertion. After devoting a small portion of his income to the support of Christian institutions at home and abroad, he is happy to think that he may expend his strength in enlarging his possessions—in securing the luxuries and elegancies of life—and in accumulating an inheritance for his children. This is a construction of the Christian's obligations, as mischievous as it is false. It has furnished a pillow on which not a few professed disciples lay their heads in deep slumber, while the perils of perdition thicken around them! They are invited to contemplate their obligations under a very different construction. According to this, they ought *actually* to devote themselves, in the strictest sense of the thrilling terms; they ought ACTUALLY to devote themselves "arm and goul," to the interests of the church. The meaning of this language I hope to place beyond the reach of misapprehension.

I know a man belonging to the class which is called *indigent*. For the support of his growing family he depends, under God, upon his daily industry. He is a Christian. And when at the missionary meeting he threw a dollar into the treasury of the Lord, he thus explained the grounds on which he proceeded. "All I am, and all I have, I have joyfully devoted to Him who redeemed me with his blood. I am under the most sacred obligations to do what I can to promote His kingdom. From these obligations I cannot, would not break away. I cannot help, then, tasking my ingenuity and urging my powers to the utmost, to furnish my proportion of the means of diffusing far and wide the sweet influence of Christian truth. What that proportion is, it may help me to determine, to reflect upon the exertions I certainly should make to redeem a child from servitude. Poor as I am, I know full well that by practising the most wakeful industry and the most rigid economy, I should be able, besides supporting my family, to raise a considerable sum every year for such an object. And, O, can I do less to save a world weltering in its own blood, from the horrors of eternal death!"

Another man I know, who has a full competence. He also is a Christian. He thinks it not enough to maintain among his fellow-men a reputable profession. "Bought with a price," how can he think himself his own? Whatever he is and has, he resolves shall be sacred to the Savior. In the general outline and minute details of business he feels himself bound, continually, to act with a direct and honest reference to the welfare of the church. When he sows, and when he reaps his fields; whenever he goes a journey, and whenever he makes a contract; in the style of his living, and in the education of his children, he is governed in every movement by strong desires to extend the kingdom of the Savior. For this he "lives." Here is the spring of his activity—the source of his enjoyment.

The other man, you see, is a "wealthy disciple." He is one of the few, who, in despite of the obstacles thrown in the rich man's course, is making progress in the "strait and narrow way." A happy exposition of the principles on which, as a Christian, he feels bound to act, you may find in a short address once made to his collected family. "It is my distinguished privilege," he said, "to be a Christian. Alas, how few who are held by the same embarrassments, rejoice in the same hopes! May I never for a moment cease to feel the peculiar obligations under which discriminating grace has placed me! What return can I make, as a proper expression of gratitude and love to my gracious Benefactor? I am His, wholly His, His for ever. You would not expect, you would not desire, that your father, held by such obligations, would consult his own ease, or your natural propensities. *Your father is a Christian.* He may not live to himself. The large resources which are placed within his reach, are sacred to the Savior. To appropriate them as an inheritance to you would be little less than sacrilege. Know then, that from your father you may expect whatever may contribute to form your character on the Christian model. The best means of mental and moral discipline he will promptly furnish. He will not fail to do his utmost to prepare you to be extensively useful and happy in the stations which may be allotted you. But further than this he cannot go. The church is required by her Lord to put forth an agonizing effort to save a sinking world. God forbid that I should be wanting to this effort. My time, influence, and property I cannot withhold. It is my duty and privilege to bring forward whatever acquisitions I can command, to meet the various claims of my Christian profession." Illustrations such as these may sufficiently explain the obligations asserted in the statement with which this discourse begins.

Of the truth of this statement, strong presumptive evidence may be found in

the fact, that to every professed Christian is furnished in the providence of God a sphere of exertion in building up the church, which demands the highest exercise of all the powers he may possess. A company of firemen with their enginery gather around a house. At different points the smoke already begins to issue through the covering. Here and there the pent-up flame fitfully breaks forth. The proprietor is at a distance—the family are asleep—the neighborhood is unalarmed. These men are trained to the work of contending with the flames—the agency through which they may exert their powers with decision and effect is fully within their reach—a sphere of exertion is open before them, which demands the highest efforts they are able to put forth. Can they doubt for a single moment what they ought to do? Are not their obligations to exert every power clearly written out on the smoking building before them?

Take another case. A surgeon, a physician, and their attendants enter a hospital. Here lies a wretch with a mangled leg, and there another with a broken arm. On that heap of straw lies a poor creature, well-nigh consumed with a burning fever; and at no great distance beyond, a companion in affliction ready to die through mere neglect. Can these men, skilled as they are in the healing art, doubt what they ought to do? Do not the imploring looks, the deep groans, the wasted frames of the sufferers before them urge home their obligations clearly, impressively, powerfully? Will not the sphere of usefulness on which they have entered, constrain them to see and feel that a demand is made for whatever of professional skill and activity they are able to employ?

Contemplate, Christian brethren, the circumstances in which the providence of God has placed you. Behold a world "lying in wickedness." There, at a distance, wrapped in the gloom of the shadow of death, are unnumbered pagans. Here, near at hand, are young communities, growing settlements, feeble churches, "ready to perish" for the bread of life. Does not every object which you see, and every sound which you hear, urge you to do what you can to save a dying world? Are you qualified to preach the gospel? Have you received a discipline, intellectual and moral, which has fitted you to explain, apply, and enforce the truths of the Bible? And can you not see and feel that to this work you ought to devote your time and strength, cordially, skilfully, untiringly? How can you indulge in literary leisure, engage in secular employments, toil for the luxuries of life, while those who are "bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh" are sinking by hundreds and thousands to perdition for want of the aid which you are able to assist in furnishing! How can you help feeling called upon as by a thousand voices breaking on your ears in tones of deep distress, to rise up and toil to the utmost of your powers for guilty, bleeding humanity!

Or it may be that you are distinguished for skill and experience in forming the young mind to habits of correct thought and feeling. You are qualified to arrest and fix their attention, to interest and animate their minds; to urge home with warm affections and arousing pungency the healing truths of the gospel. Extend your view, then, to the "Valley of the Mississippi." Behold the multitudes of youth and children! Here, their education is utterly neglected; there, it is entirely perverted. In one place, they are left to wander in ignorance, and become the prey of some artful superstition; in another, the life-blood is poisoned at the fountain by infidelity. And yet these young minds, thus neglected or perverted, are, under God, at no distant day to give shape to the destinies of this mighty nation! Can you think of this, and not see a sphere of exertion which loudly and imperiously demands the exercise of all your powers? Now extend the limits of your field of observation. A world is before you. Unnumbered millions of young immortals stretch out their hands, and by signs of distress which cannot be mistaken, implore assistance. And can you doubt

whether you ought to make sacrifices, and submit to self-denial—to task every power of mind and body to afford relief?

Or, perhaps, you are distinguished by elevated station; weight of character; extent of influence. Your name is known, your opinions are quoted, your views are adopted by a large circle. Look upon your right hand and left. Wherever you go do you not behold appalling monuments of hostility to the Son of God? At the inn, in the stage, on board the steamboat; in the fashionable circle and the literary club; in the hall of legislation, and on the seat of justice, do you not often see your Savior contradicted, opposed, derided? And can you look on without emotion? Are not appeals thus sent home to your souls, calling you to stand up in defence of the name and truth of your Redeemer? Ought you not to put forth prompt, decisive, untiring efforts to purify public sentiment? Can you hesitate a moment on the question of your obligations?

Or, perhaps, you are affluent. O, then, consider the wants of the church, and the miseries of the world! Mark the condition of the various institutions around you whose object and tendency are to diffuse the light of life. See by what embarrassments their movements are retarded. Can you look upon their exhausted treasuries without feeling your obligations to consecrate your gold and silver to the service of your Lord? Ought you not to lay your accumulated treasures at the foot of the cross—to devote your shining dust to the great work of extending the triumphs of your King?

Whatever, fellow-Christians, may be the stations which you occupy; whatever the means of usefulness you can command; the spheres of Christian effort opened before you clearly and impressively require you to devote all you are and all you have to the single object of building up the church.

A SECOND argument, to sustain the statement at the beginning of this discourse, may be found in the design of the probation, by which the church, considered collectively or individually, is to be trained up for heaven. As individuals, Christians are to be trained up in the church, to find their happiness in the service and enjoyment of God. In this, heaven itself consists. There, the disciples of the Savior behold the glory of their Lord. There, "His servants serve Him." To find in His service the source of eternal blessedness; to find in His presence the fountain of life, our character must be conformed to His. Otherwise, His service would disgust us—His presence would torment us. Now, just so far as we are under the control of that benevolence which appropriately expresses itself in exertions to build up the church, just so far is our character conformed to the Divine. And in whatever degree we are selfish, in the same degree must we be unable to find our happiness in God. And nothing but selfishness can lead us to cultivate a field of exertion and maintain a deportment of interest separate from the kingdom of heaven. A just estimate of the different objects to which we are related—of the different interests in which we are concerned, would constrain us to regard ourselves in all our plans and movements as entirely subservient to the glory of His name and the advancement of His cause. Practically to regard ourselves in this light is to be benevolent—is to be like God. That discipline which is fitted to bring us thus to regard ourselves, is adapted to the design of the probation in which we are placed. And this discipline is involved in the obligations which bind us to consecrate ourselves without hesitation or reserve as a living sacrifice to God. Those who yield to these obligations secure this discipline. Its healthful influence reaches their inmost hearts. The plague which was preying on their vitals is stayed. Life throbs through all their veins. They "are strong in the Lord." The image of the Savior in all its beauty smiles through all their "inner man." They already enter into the sympathies and breathe the spirit of their brethren in heaven.

And when they pass from probationary scenes, they will be prepared to enter into "the joys of their Lord."

As *Christian communities*, if they would answer the end of their probation, the churches must devote themselves altogether to the service of Christ. They are here to be trained up in their collective capacity and social interests, for the everlasting employments and joys of the upper world. This can be done only by a discipline which will bring their feelings to flow forth in the same strain with delightful harmony—all their powers to act in the same direction, in full, unbroken concert. But this precious result can never be produced, while they "look every one upon his own things." While to *any extent* they allow themselves to pursue selfish designs, harsh discord must interrupt or mar the songs of Zion. Separate interests—private objects, will set brother against brother—discord will rend the church. Of the truth of these statements, what frightful illustrations may be found on almost every page of our history.

To be prepared for the harmony of heaven, professed Christians must receive the very discipline which an entire consecration to their Savior's service affords. Mark the movements and study the character of a Christian community, to which a description like the following may be justly applied. The object which attracts their attention, and engrosses their affections, and calls forth all their active powers, is the extension and prosperity of Zion. Every man, woman, and child in this community, keeps his eye upon this object, as the end of his existence. To advance the common design, they all seek and find, each his proper place, the sphere best suited to his own talents and means of usefulness. Whatever of intellectual vigor, of mental acquisition, of impressive eloquence,—whatever weight of authority, extent of influence, amount of property,—whatever sagacity, skill, and energy they may possess, they bring directly and unceasingly to bear upon the great enterprise in which they are engaged. From this they never turn their eyes—never withdraw their hands. Now tell me, is not this community acting under an influence which binds them together as by golden bonds? Must they not see eye to eye? Must not heart mingle with heart? Will they not bow, as by a common impulse, before the throne of Messiah? Will not the same desires move their hearts?—the same songs flow from their lips? Will not the same living peace pervade every heart—soothe every bosom—smile upon every countenance? And when you look upon this community, you cannot help recognising the image of heaven. They are prepared, *as a body*, when they reach the presence of their King, to fall each into his appropriate place and act in concert in fulfilling His sovereign will. They have secured the very discipline which the holy employments and joys of the upper world demand.

A *THIRD* argument, sustaining the same position, may be found in the *conditions on which we are required to lay hold of the benefits offered in the gospel*. Consider, brethren, the import and bearing of the following piercing words, from the Savior's lips. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it." Strong language! And yet not too strong to describe the conditions on which the benefits of redeeming mercy may be secured. The glory of your King, the extension of his sway, the fulfilment of his designs, you are to prefer to the dearest earthly gratification—to the highest worldly interest. The ties which bind you to the *nearest relative*—your hold on life itself, you must break asunder, if the interests of the kingdom of heaven demand the effort. Wherever you may go, you must bear around a cross, prepared at any time to "be lifted up upon it." Nor can you think these hard conditions on which to

receive the offer of eternal life till you forget the atoning agonies which broke the heart of our great High-priest.

Now it was a leading object of the Savior to be the "light of the world." To this object His labors and sufferings were directed. The balm of life He would offer to a bleeding world. It is His sovereign will, that to all the human family infected "with the plague of the heart," His healing power should be proclaimed. His gracious heart is set upon bringing all nations under the shadow of His throne. Whoever, then, loves the Son of God more than every other object will feel himself constrained at all times and in every thing, to act with simple reference to the prosperity of His kingdom. This reference will give shape to every plan, and force to every movement. Is he engaged "in business?" He will see that its claims and tendencies do not interfere with his obligations to the Savior. Whatever goes to diminish his influence as a Christian he will promptly avoid. The means requisite to enlighten his understanding, to keep his conscience wakeful and tender—to bring his heart under the full control of Christian motives, he will not fail at any expense of time and strength to employ. Whenever the question arises—and such questions will arise—whether he shall lay out his resources in gratifying taste, in humoring appetite, in pampering passion, in feeding avarice in himself and children, or in efforts to build up the church, he will not long hesitate. He will not forget the cross which his profession requires him to bear. How can he toil for the elegancies and luxuries of life; gratify the demands of ambition or cupidity; or divide his substance among worldly-minded heirs; and still be complying with the conditions on which the smiles of Messiah are dispensed?

In this connection, it may be proper to repeat another declaration of the Savior. "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Whoever will examine this declaration in the connection to which it belongs, will see that it involves a clear exposition of the terms of Christian discipleship. Along with this statement it may be well to contemplate the practical application of the general principle it contains, which the Savior himself has given us.—A young man of fair morals and amiable spirit once presented to Him the inquiry, "What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Our Lord first directed his attention to the obligations which grew out of the relations he sustained to his fellow-men. Upon this, the young man assured him that to these obligations he had ever paid a practical regard. The amiable aspect of his character attracted the Savior's love; and he immediately called his attention to the great principles on which Christian character is formed, and on which Christian hopes may be justly cherished. Hitherto only the relations which man sustains to man had been brought to view. The principle, just alluded to, then was presented in a form modified by these relations. "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come take up thy cross and follow me." With the condition of salvation, implied in this direction, the youth refused to comply. He clung to his wealth at the expense of his soul. If he must devote himself entirely to the cause of benevolence or make shipwreck of his hope of heaven, his hope of heaven, though with many tears, he was prepared to relinquish.

What think ye, Christian brethren, of this practical exposition of the conditions, on which you are to be admitted to the fountain of life? Say not that its application was peculiar to the poor young man to whom it was first applied. You cannot help seeing, that the exposition just covers the ground furnished by the abstract principle already quoted. The principle, then, with its exposition, *belongs to you*—belongs to every professed Christian. Take home, then, to your inmost thoughts the condition on which the life of your souls is suspended.

What, friends of the Lord Jesus, will you do with your wealth, your talents, your influence? Will you live merely or chiefly to promote your own private interests? Will you extend your possessions for the sake of exulting in affluence? Will you increase your influence for the sake of bending your fellow-men to your designs? Will you seek an exalted station for the sake of enjoying the pomp of place? Ah, brethren, this you may not do without drawing down the curse of Jesus Christ. If you would have His smiles, you must yield up your souls to the control of that charity which brought Him from the bosom of blessedness to the agonies of crucifixion. You must live for the single purpose of doing good. Whatever strength you have you must freely expend in urging forward the triumphal chariot of Messiah.

In this connection, the last injunction which fell from the Mediator's lips well deserves attention. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The obligations of this command reach every professed Christian. It may be said, that they direct their binding influence especially to *Christian ministers*. It may be so. What then? Are not their Christian brethren held by the same solemn bonds to furnish the ministers of Christ with whatever means are requisite to enable them to offer the "bread of life" to the famishing nations? "Who goeth a warfare at his own charges?" The great work of gathering the human family around the cross lies fully before every friend of Jesus. In this work he is bound by the authority of God to engage with a zeal and resolution proportioned to the magnitude of the task imposed upon him. Remember, then, Christian brethren, that your "field is the world." A frightful majority of the human family are shrouded in gloom, palpable as the darkness which once oppressed Egypt. It is yours to offer them the "light of life." While you linger, myriads fall to rise no more. With your utmost efforts, a multitude "which no man can number" will miserably perish before your hands can reach them. With every breath you draw, they are sinking by thousands into the abyss! Your Savior bids you haste to their relief—to snatch them from ruin, "as brands from the burning." If they die through your neglect, you must answer for their blood! What, then, ought you to do? To stand unmoved amid the ruins of the world! With the censer in your hand, will you refuse to rush in "between the living and the dead," to contend with "the plague" which is every moment sweeping thousands to an untimely grave? And for what? That you may be at ease? That you may heap up golden dust? That you may attract the gaze of admiration? That you may crush your children with the weight of an inheritance? And will you sell "the souls for which Christ died," for trifles such as these? This you cannot do without casting off your allegiance to Christ and breaking the ties which bind you to His throne.

A *FOURTH* argument adapted to convince professed Christians that they ought thus unreservedly to consecrate themselves to the service of the church may be found in the *EXAMPLE OF THE BEST MEN, who have risen up from time to time to bless mankind*.—The example of the man *Christ Jesus* shines with peculiar lustre. O, let us keep our eyes upon it! He came into the world to place the church on a foundation which could not be shaken. Now trace His course, from the manger to the cross—from the cross to the mediatorial throne. How is every footstep marked, every movement distinguished by entire consecration to the kingdom of heaven! How did the most vehement desires for the immortal happiness of man move his soul! With what ardor did His affections cleave to this object? How studiously and skilfully did He improve every opportunity and employ every agency, which might promote His design! When did He shun an effort, however expensive; decline self-denial, however trying; shrink from sacrifices, however expensive, which the glory of God and the "saving health of

nations" required! Surely not when in solitary places He poured out His soul in prayer at midnight! or when "He went about doing good!" or when He "endured the contradiction of sinners!" or when He lay prostrate in agony at His Father's feet in the garden! or, when he meekly bore the taunts and jeers and buffetings of His accusers in the judgment hall!" or, when in agonies unutterable, He "gave up the ghost" upon the cross! "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us; AND WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR THE BRETHREN."

And what shall we say of the example which the primitive churches set? Observe with what devotedness they cling to the heavenly cause. Their time, substance, influence are sacred to the Savior. "Of one heart they have all things common." Whatever the common interest demands each in his proper place is forward to supply. They "take joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" they welcome the prison, embrace the stake, when their Christian profession requires the sacrifice. Are these *your own brethren*? Trace their shining course; and answer the inquiry.

Read the history of the apostle to the gentiles. How he breathes the spirit of Christian heroism. Now he encounters the perils of the deep, and now the dangers of the wilderness. He welcomes heat and cold, hunger and thirst in his sacred work. He shakes the lean hand of poverty—meets the frowning face of opposition. He breaks through every embarrassment, and rises above every obstacle. "*One thing he does.*" And to this one thing all he is and has is cordially devoted. "Brethren," you may hear him say, "*be followers of me.*"

And what shall we say of the course of our missionary brethren, who are carrying the lamp of truth to the "dark places of the earth." Were they to keep back aught "that they possess," should we be slow to expose in pointed terms their delinquency? We require them "to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified"—to live merely to extend the triumphs of the cross. But say, brethren, are they held by obligations from which *you are free*? Were they bought with richer blood—with severer agonies than you? Was higher grace displayed in the means employed to bring them to the Savior's feet—to raise them to the hope of heaven, than has been bestowed on you? Do they need a more rugged discipline than you to wean them from the world—to fix their hearts upon an enduring treasure? Do not you live under the same government? Are you not bound by the same laws? Let such inquiries receive an honest answer. You cannot help seeing that you ought, in your own proper sphere, to be as much devoted to the kingdom of heaven, as the most laborious and self-denied missionary.

The truth of all this some of your brethren engaged in secular as well as sacred employments have already welcomed. Their daily business they have learned to transact with an "eye single to the glory of God." They push forward their designs with promptness and energy, merely to be able to do good. These men may be found all along on the declivity from the heights of affluence to the vale of poverty. The Lord increase them a hundred-fold!

Now what is *Christian example*, however modified, and wherever presented, but *human obligation*, embodied in a living and attractive form. Behold the form! Can you resist charms so divine? Can you refuse to imbibe a spirit so heavenly? How can you refuse to tread in the foot-prints of those, who "through faith and patience inherit the promises?"

I see a heavenly vision.—"The ransomed of the Lord," each in his appropriate place, gather around the "Captain of their salvation." None is wanting—none reluctant. Behold the "sacramental host of God's elect!" One object engrosses their attention; one spirit animates their bosoms; one enterprise

calls forth their collective powers. "The one thing they do" is to support the throne and extend the kingdom of their Messiah. To accomplish this, they glory in labors, sacrifices, tribulations. They task every power to fulfil the will of the Majesty by whose behest they are awed and controlled. As it is His will, so it is their steadfast purpose, to bring a world in subjection to his feet. Thus, they welcome the condition on which his smiles are bestowed. Thus, they are receiving the very discipline by which they may be prepared to join the heavenly hosts. Thus, they are breaking the chains in which a world has long been held; and lo, the shout of emancipated myriads, "like the voice of many waters," shakes the pillars of the universe!

The foregoing train of thought involves a test by which *professed Christians may try their own character*. Let each of us, dear brethren, seriously weigh the inquiry, Do I belong to that happy number to whom the apostle applies the graphical description, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's?" This, clearly, is a description of *Christian character*. Am I, then, a *Christian*? Is it the great end of all my designs, plans, and exertions, to glorify the Savior and build up his cause? Do I *rejoice* to live and toil for an object so dear to God? Or do I regard the prosperity of Zion only as an object of *secondary* importance? Do I meet the expenses which are requisite to support Christian institutions at home and abroad, reluctantly and grudgingly? Am I more anxious to enjoy the privileges of the gospel *cheaply*, than to derive from them the highest benefit? When called to incur expense and sacrifices for the sake of advancing the Redeemer's kingdom, am I apt to be cold, impatient, peevish? Am I prone to wish that the friends of God and man, in their efforts to "spread the gospel," would act on plans less comprehensive and expensive? Am I often tempted to suspect the purity of their motives; to misinterpret their language, and misrepresent their conduct? Do I often eagerly and loudly complain of the burdens which my Christian profession imposes on me? Do I sometimes detect in myself sentiments of regret that I *ever joined* the Christian standard? Ah, brethren, these and such as these are serious questions, and deserve a serious answer. They bear directly on the soundness of our religious character. They point to the ground on which multiplied *decent professions* betray the rottenness of their hearts. It is high time for us to urge home upon our souls with searching hand the inquiry whether we are living to God or to ourselves. The apathy and selfishness of thousands in the church have already occasioned the endless ruin of unnumbered millions! Long ago had professed Christians, as a body, yielded to the obligations by which their Lord had bound them—long ago had the "earth been filled with his glory!" Never will His grace and power be universally known, till the church more generally and accurately answers to the description of character given at the commencement of this discourse. Let those who would not in the final day be required to answer for the blood of their brethren look well to this matter. Wo to the false disciple, who, in despite of obligations as sacred as the authority of God, lives to himself—lives for any other object than the prosperity of Zion! He may have his frames—his joys and sorrows; his fears and hopes; and after all miserably perish. Who, then, is he, who while he lays his soul at the feet of Jesus Christ for salvation is ready to devote himself a living sacrifice to His service? He is the man who, in the day of retribution, shall be welcomed to the "joy of his Lord." Be ours the blessedness of and full participation in his labors and rewards!

SERMON CXXII.

BY REV. BERIAH GREEN.

CLAIMS OF THE PRISON DISCIPLINE SOCIETY TO THE SUPPORT OF CHRISTIANS.

MATT. V. 44-47.—*But I say unto you, love your enemies ; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ? do not even the publicans the same ? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others ? do not even the publicans so ?*

THIS passage presents one important point, in which Christians are required to rise above others. Every man has his objects of kind regard. Robbers and assassins love each other. And while upon all around them they wage a deadly warfare, they may defend each other's rights with the utmost decision of purpose, and energy of action. Much more do men of elevated morals and taste cherish for the larger circle in which they move, a generous confidence and lively attachment. But Christian benevolence, while it strengthens and refines every amiable feeling natural to man, may also be expected to raise him to a higher, wider sphere of action. It will not permit him to confine his regards to a circle of friends. He may not think it enough to extend this circle, so as to admit the deserving and unfortunate. *Christian principles will lead him to pity and bless such objects of want and woe as his natural feelings would prompt him to overlook or hate.* This statement is clearly supported by the passage which stands at the head of this discourse. *Those forms, then, of guilty suffering humanity which others regard with aversion or neglect, Christians may be expected to pity and bless.* This truth it is my design to illustrate in application to the objects embraced by the PRISON DISCIPLINE SOCIETY. This society was organized in Boston about six years ago. Its great design is to promote the improvement of public prisons. To this design it has consecrated its resources and strength. Its funds have never been large—never risen to four thousand dollars in a year. These are committed to a board of managers, worthy of the entire confidence of the Christian public.

The results of their labors furnish decisive proof that their well-directed efforts have been attended with the smiles of God.

Never, perhaps, does guilty suffering humanity assume a form more likely to be overlooked or despised by the world at large than in the person of the imprisoned convict. But Christians may justly be expected to regard him with pity—may justly be expected to make prompt and vigorous exertions to promote his welfare. This I argue,

I. *From the character of Christians.* There are three things especially in this character that must lead Christians to be the cordial friends and patrons of the Prison Discipline Society.

1. A leading attribute of Christian character is *disinterested benevolence.* Who that reads the Bible needs to be informed that "*love is the fulfilling of the law*" ? Who does not know, that the great principles of the Divine government are exhibited in the same light in the gospel as in the law ? Hence we are bound by the authority of Jesus Christ, as well as by the injunctions pub-

lished from Sinai, to love our neighbor as ourselves. And this benevolence is the very basis of Christian character. "Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." Now let a man, warmed with Christian benevolence, take his stand for a single hour in the evening near a crowded night-room in one of our public prisons. With what assiduity and skill and energy are the old instructing the young in the science of sinning! How clearly and impressively are the mysteries of iniquity explained! What shrewdness, and sagacity, and foresight, are evinced in giving shape to new plans for committing crimes! With what facts are not the less-experienced convicts tempted to go greater lengths in sin, when opportunity shall permit! With what appeals are they not fired with a deadlier hate to the unoffending community! What language of obscenity and blasphemy! What nameless abuses do not the older convicts, hardened in crime and dead to shame, practise upon the defenceless bodies of their younger companions! With what deadly threats do not the tyrants of the den forbid their helpless, suffering fellow-prisoners to shed a ray of light on these deeds of darkness! Now could a Christian witness scenes like these without being moved to deepest compassion? Would not every feeling of benevolence be excited? Would not strong desires be awakened to do something for these wretched men, before death shall put its seal upon their guilty characters? And if by any means their "feet might be taken from the horrible pit and the miry clay and placed upon a rock," would not almost any labor, any expense, any self-denial, be cordially welcomed? With what confidence, then, might not the friends of improvement in prison discipline appeal to Christians, and expect their countenance and aid, on the ground of that benevolence which is the leading element of their character!

2. The friends of improvement in prison discipline expect the countenance and aid of Christians, from the *deep sense of personal guilt they habitually maintain*. In the light of the law of God, they have subjected their own hearts to a severe scrutiny. They have seen and felt that they were *sinners*. When their eyes were first opened upon themselves, they were stung with the conviction "that in them by nature dwelt nothing good." They could not but see, that if the restraining grace of God were withheld, there is no sin forbidden in the divine law which they could not be liable to commit. And even now, though sanctified in part, they deeply feel that they are secure from the danger of committing the foulest crimes, only as they are guided, restrained, upheld by the Savior's hand. Now with such views of their own character—with such a sense of personal guilt, they cannot turn away from the poor convict, as if he belonged to a more depraved and degraded race than themselves. They will not frown him from their presence with affected wonder, that he could find *himself capable* of committing crimes. While they abhor his sins, they will yet see in his face the *features of a brother*. That they have not gone as far in wickedness, they will be forward to ascribe to the discriminating grace of God. Sentiments of contempt and scorn they cannot cherish. They will not say he has disgraced human nature; let him as he deserves pine and perish in his crimes. They will be ready to inquire if something cannot be done to elevate his character, and improve his condition and prospects? Regarding him as a *fellow-sinner*, of all men they may be expected most cordially to countenance, and most promptly and vigorously to aid those who are toiling for his welfare.

3. Especially will the friends of improvement in prison discipline cherish this expectation, when they remember that in their own experience Christians have full and delightful evidence, that the *grace of God is of sufficient efficacy to work a radical and permanent reformation in the character of sinners, however deeply depraved*. Christians will not regard the character of the foulest convict as ruined beyond the hope of reformation. They will not say, when urged to lend

a hand to aid in lifting him from the "miry clay." It is labor lost: he has reduced his soul to such a wreck that no hand can repair the ruin: we will not waste our feelings and strength in so desperate an enterprise. Men who have never found by experience that the gospel applied by the Holy Ghost is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" to salvation, may hold this language. But can those who have *felt in the renovation of their own hearts* the power of the Divine hand despair of the reformation and salvation of the wretched convict? While they remember what God has done and is every day doing for their souls, they will be ready for efforts to save the souls of others with hope of success. And hope, so conceived and so maintained, will impart energy to their exertions. How can they help giving arm and soul to the designs of the Prison Discipline Society?

II. That Christians may justly be expected to countenance and aid the friends of improvement in prison discipline, may be argued *from the means of usefulness they are able to employ.*

They breathe the spirit of prayer. To the precious injunction, *Draw near to God*, they have listened. Their hearts have been moved with the sweet motive by which that injunction is sent home to the bosom—*And he will draw near to you.* With the way to the Throne of Grace they are well acquainted. Every day are their feet in the blessed path. What choice benefits—light, strength, consolation, grace to help in time of need, have they not often obtained through the medium of prayer! And this medium is continually before them. How are they furnished, then, for the difficult, self-denying enterprise in which the Prison Discipline Society is engaged! Other men, when they looked in upon the poor prisoner in his lonely cell; when they thought upon his darkness of mind, his long-cherished prejudices, his "vile affections," his confirmed habits of sinning, might feel that any means of doing him substantial good in their possession must be altogether inadequate. But Christians in these circumstances would lift up their hearts and hands to Heaven. They would be encouraged with the remembrance of benefits they had often obtained from a throne of grace. What difficulties had they not seen removed by prayer! Before this weapon their strongest foes had often fled in dismay. Nor could the stoutest demon of the pit withstand its edge and point. Wielding such a weapon, why should they not attack the "legion" of foul spirits ever hovering around the penitentiary, to haunt and torment its inmates? Surely, he into whose bosom the spirit of prayer has been breathed, is qualified effectually to promote the design of the Prison Discipline Society. Christians have been taught, moreover, that *in their Bibles* they have the *very means which are adapted to secure the benefits* they had been seeking in fervent prayer. The sacred volume, they know, can pour a flood of light upon the benighted understanding; arouse the sensibilities of the seared conscience; root up the earliest prejudices; cleanse and heal the corrupted heart. Those who regard the word of God as "a dead letter," may well look upon the poor prisoner, shrouded in darkness and loaded with chains, as ruined beyond recovery. They will look around them in despair of finding any agency adapted to quicken his dead soul. They may paint, with whatever skill they can, the ugliness of vice and the beauty of virtue. They might as well hope by such means to charm the deaf adder, as to work a thorough reform in the hardened convict. Hence, those who have never felt the transforming power of divine truth, however they may glory in their unstained morals, are apt to look upon the reformation of the prisoner with heartless despondency. They never dream that the Bible, which lies covered with dust upon their table, is the hiding-place of Jehovah's power. They never dream that it is the instrument with which, from a shapeless heap of ruins, the Holy Ghost often rears up a glorious temple, fit for the residence of God. They never dream, that by the agency of this neglected volume, the Savior calls the

forgotten dead from their graves ! True, they sometimes witness these effects ; but how often with the vacant stare, with which they wonder at the arts of the magician, rather than with the healthful perception of the tendencies of truth, carried out to these results by the hand of God ! But Christians better understand the word of God. They see in the facts it presents ; in its precepts ; in its promises and threatenings, addressed to human fears and hopes, that it is adapted, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to regenerate, to sanctify, and to save. And the Holy Spirit is their own covenant Helper, ever present to guide and sustain ; to cheer and succeed. Animated with the breath of prayer, with the living word of God in their hands, and upheld and borne onward by the Holy Ghost, are not Christians the very men to attempt deeds of mercy in the gloomy recesses of the prison ? Will not some of them in person publish salvation to the desponding convict, and cry aloud to the wretch sinking beneath his load of guilt, " Behold the Lamb of God ! " Will not others cheerfully furnish the means requisite to carry to the highest improvement the discipline of the public prison ? If, with the means of promoting this great design, so peculiarly and appropriately their own, they refuse to bless the guilty suffering convict, where shall he look for compassion and assistance ?

III. *The commands of Jesus Christ bind his disciples to labor for the benefit of imprisoned criminals.* The number of their fellow-men which every year enter the door of the public prison is not small. A careful estimation places the inmates of the prisons in the United States at about ten thousand. Let the Christian contemplate these thousands in the light of the memorable injunction from the lips of his ascending Lord. To every creature he is bound to do what in him lies to give the gospel. Its thrilling facts, its holy precepts, its overtures of mercy, its appalling threatenings, he is required to urge on the attention—to send home to the " business and bosom " of all his fellow-sinners. Who then may exclude the convict from the benefits of the gospel ? Is not the penitentiary a part of " all the world ? " Was not each prisoner, employed in its shops or confined in its cells, on the heart and in the eye of the Redeemer, when he bound his church to give the gospel to " every creature ? " The paragraph which stands at the head of this discourse may much assist us in ascertaining the extent of our obligations to labor for the salvation of the human family. It is very certain that these obligations do not permit us to overlook our enemies. A benevolence which confines its regards to those who love us and *deserve* our kind attentions the Savior pronounces base and spurious. It is a sentiment which may thrive in the most depraved heart. But Christians must rise above the world by imitating the example of their Lord, in caring for the welfare, in toiling for the salvation of their bitterest enemies. He freely poured out his blood upon the cross for those who repaid his kindness with hate and deadly persecution. His shining example demands a careful imitation. Now what if it be alleged against the prisoner, that he has waged war upon the community around him ; that he has broken the most sacred ties that bind him to his country ; that he has trampled on the majesty of the laws ; that he deserves the abhorrence and execration of every man he meets ? What then ? Are you a *Christian* ? Have you forgotten for whom your Redeemer felt deepest solicitude ; went through exhausting labors ; endured the greatest sufferings ? Were they not all, without the exception of yourself, foes of Heaven ; exposed to the wrath of God—bending under a load of guilt which deserved his withering curse ? How then can you regard the crimes of the convict, however numerous and loathsome, as placing him beyond the field of your benevolent exertion ? You cannot so regard him without forgetting the example of your Savior, violating his injunctions, and forfeiting the character and hopes of the consistent Christian.

IV. *The providences of God greatly encourage the expectation that Christians will be forward to do what they can to promote the highest interests of the prisoner.* The exertions of the Prison Discipline Society have by no means been in vain. The leading agents of this society have at every step been sustained and cheered by the smiles of Heaven. He has directed *the attention and cordial regard of influential men*, in different parts of the United States, to the great design. The influence of the society has evidently reached, in different instances, the hall of legislation. The principal agent of the society has not only been permitted, but also requested, to spread out beneath the eye of men distinguished for talents, and station, and influence, the facts which had been collected, and the plans which had been formed. Thus the society have found access to the very heart of the body politic; have been permitted to touch the very mainspring of civil society. The means of usefulness which have thus been placed within their reach have not only been appropriate to their design, but also of a highly efficient character. Nor have such means been placed within their reach in vain. *The most important and valuable improvements in the construction of public prisons have in a number of instances been the direct or indirect result of their counsel and exertions.* These improvements have been followed by the happiest consequences. The weak among the convicts have been snatched from the iron grasp of the strong. A barrier has been raised to protect the young offender from the poisonous breath of the hardened villain. Hundreds of victims have been taken from the bony hand of death. Opportunity, in circumstances highly favorable, has been afforded to toil for the thorough reformation of the prisoner; to inure him to habits of industry and frugality; to deliver him from the subtle yet powerful workings of those prejudices which make him the determined foe of human welfare; to awaken in his bosom those generous feelings which may fit and dispose him to sympathize with his fellow-men; to shed the light of wisdom, human and divine, upon his understanding; and to pour the healing influence of heavenly truth upon his heart. Opportunity has been afforded to enrich the unlettered with the elements of useful learning; and in the Sabbath-school and pulpit, as well as in personal intercourse with convicts, to urge home eternal things in all their weight. The prisoner, both by night and day, is placed in circumstances which invite serious reflection, far removed from the deadly influence of ungodly companions. However they may wish to thrust him down deeper and still deeper in the "horrible pit," the strong hand of wholesome discipline restrains them. He may think and pray, "with none to molest or make him afraid." Nay, the deep solitude which prevails around him constrains him to hold communion with himself, and review carefully the pages of his past history. Wherever a prison is constructed on the plan of that at Auburn, or Wethersfield, or Charlestown, I see a monument of God's kind regard for the design of the Prison Discipline Society; a monument on which is inscribed in plain characters, written with the finger of the Savior, "Fear not, I am with you. Go forward, for glorious success shall crown your benevolent exertions."

It is a fact in a high degree favorable to the design of the Prison Discipline Society, that in the providence of God a deep conviction has been wrought in the minds of multitudes, that religious instruction is an essential part of healthful prison discipline. This conviction is now fastened on minds formerly opposed to the introduction of religious agencies into the Penitentiary. Of these men the testimony is harmonious and strong, that Christian truth, urged on the heart of the convict, in the affectionate voice of a devoted teacher, has a most salutary tendency. This testimony is working a happy effect upon public sentiment. Here and there an individual, well qualified for the station, devotes soul and body, under Jesus Christ, to the spiritual welfare of prisoners. Legislatures are be-

ginning to make provision for the religious improvement of the penitentiaries under their control. Thus a new day is dawning on the prison. The rays of a glorious sun begin to pierce the gloom of its cells. Will not *Christians* listen to the voice of God in his holy providence bidding them rise and exert themselves in behalf of their fellow-sinners, justly confined? Especially, may they not be expected so to do, in full view of the striking displays of his power and grace which *Jesus Christ* has made, in the conversion and thorough reformation of imprisoned criminals? There have been seasons when passing along in front of the cells which the prisoners had entered at the close of the day, they might have looked in upon one and another, bending in deep study over the sacred page, and again upon one and another prostrate before God in prayer. One prisoner they might have found stung with a painful sense of guilt; another weeping at the foot of the cross; and a third rejoicing in "hope of the glory of God." The effects which have thus been wrought upon the consciences and hearts of these awakened prisoners have not been transient. I have just taken my eye from a page which shines more resplendently than a diamond amid sunbeams. It gives the initial letters of some eighty prisoners' names, who had been discharged from one of our penitentiaries. Of these, a number had enjoyed their liberty eight or nine years. On the authority of "letters received from postmasters, sheriffs, district attorneys, and other public officers," their character since their discharge is given to the world. Beginning at the top of the column, the description of their character proceeds in the following style: "Honest, fair character; bad; bad; not improved; nothing improper; character good; character good; character good; in jail for larceny; much improved; sober, discreet man; industrious and honest; character and conduct good; very respectable; steady, and industrious; entirely reformed; respectable and pious." What good man can look over such a column without seeing the hand of God beckoning him to join the goodly band now laboring for the reformation of the prisoner? What motive, derived from the arrangements of Divine Providence, can be better fitted to act upon a Christian heart? What Christian can resist such a motive? It is the voice of the Holy Ghost, calling on the churches to arise, and be "workers together with him" in his designs of mercy towards the wretched convict. What Christian will not listen to such a voice?

The grounds, then, on which the friends of improvement in prison discipline may expect the countenance and aid of Christians, are broad and substantial. These grounds we have found in the character by which Christians are distinguished from their fellow-men; in the means of usefulness peculiar to themselves, which are placed within their reach; in the obligations, by which, as the disciples of *Jesus Christ*, they are bound; and in the indications of divine Providence, which clearly point them to the penitentiary, as a sphere of benevolent exertion.

Prison Discipline, then, in order to be healthful and efficient must be conducted on Christian principles. These principles, imbodyed in the character of the disciples of the Savior, furnish the very agents which that discipline demands. Their disinterested benevolence will open a way to their hearts for the claims of the prisoner on their kind regard; their deep sense of personal guilt will constrain them to look upon him, as they would look upon a brother; the experience they have had of the efficacy of divine grace, will inspire them with hopes of success in their efforts to reclaim and save him. Are not these the very men who are fitted to labor for the highest—the immortal interests of the prisoner? Will they not of all men be likely to gain a ready and near access to his heart. While they speak to him in the softened tones of warm affection, and in the animated language of good hope, will he not be forward to listen to their words; to weigh their counsels; to make the instructions they may offer the subject of deep and healthful reflection? Of all men, will they not employ such means of usefulness,

as are adapted to work in his character a thorough and permanent amendment? Who else will kneel in his cell, and lift up to Heaven on his behalf the eye of supplication? Who else will employ with a skilful and energetic hand the only motives which can arouse his conscience and purify his heart—motives drawn fresh from the fountain of eternal truth? And who besides Christians seek and enjoy in their labors of love the assistance of the Holy Spirit? And will not they regard the obligations by which the Son of God has bound them to impart the bread of life to every creature? Will not they of all men freely expend their strength in toiling for the eternal welfare of the “evil and unthankful;” of the friendless and ill-deserving? And are they not the men who from the arrangements of Divine Providence are wont to derive lessons of instruction and motives to exertion? And have not Christian principles, imbodied in the disciples of the Savior and acting upon the understanding, conscience, and heart of the prisoner, been the means of accomplishing the most important good which in any place has resulted from prison discipline? Where have convicts been found to weep for their sins, and “turn from the evil of their ways,” under any other agency than the truth of God? And where efforts to reclaim the prisoner have resulted in a deplorable and disheartening failure, have not these efforts been made in the neglect or contempt of God and the gospel?

Might I speak to the friends of improvement in prison discipline throughout this republic and throughout the world, with what deep earnestness and strong emphasis would I say; Beware, as you would avoid utter and hopeless defeat in your designs, beware of excluding Jesus Christ from the sphere of your beneficent exertions. Without Him you can do nothing to promote the permanent benefit of the objects of your kind regard. Slight the Savior, and you enter the penitentiary only to mock the prisoner and bring disgrace upon yourselves. Do ye not know—have ye not heard—have ye not felt, that “Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God to salvation;” to the loathsome criminal as well as to the man of unblemished reputation? In this warfare, away with “carnal weapons,” wield the sword of the Spirit; and, through Jesus Christ our Lord, you are more than conquerors!

And O, if I might address the redeemed of the Lord; with what fervent importunity would I urge them to give their most efficient aid to the holy design of the Prison Discipline Society. You could not, beloved brethren, mark the object and efforts of this society without the deepest interest. You could not contemplate the field of their exertion without longing to enter as their fellow-laborers. You would pant for a fellowship in the sacred enterprise.

This field I invite you, my brethren, to contemplate. An acquaintance with it you may form through the *Reports of the Society*. Have you read them? Have you weighed the facts which they present; the plans which they describe, and the appeals which they urge? say, brethren, have ye taken them home to yourselves? Know ye not that ye are under peculiar obligations to promote an enterprise so honorable to God, so useful to men?

Give this enterprise, my brethren, your prayers, your influence, a portion of your gold and silver. To you it appropriately belongs to sustain it. God and men expect that you will rise and promote it. Will you deny that the most weighty reasons demand exertion at your hands? Stand up, then, and gird yourselves for action. Your labor in the Lord shall not be in vain. He will smile as he has smiled upon your labors in this department of Christian effort. The work shall prosper in your hands. It shall augment your final reward. In the last day the repentant convict shall outstrip angels in hastening to welcome you to “the joy of your Lord.”